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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8597
INFO RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 2924
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA 0053
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 0715
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 4672
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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1216
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0088
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0643

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 000875

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/14/2018
TAGS: PREL PINR MOPS PHUM KPKO CG

SUBJECT: DRC-RWANDAN TENSIONS MOUNT: WAR NOT LIKELY BUT
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MUST WORK WITH BOTH SIDES TO DEFUSE
TENSIONS AND AVERT WIDER CONFLICT

REF: A. (A) KINSHASA 844
1B. (B) KINSHASA 786
1C. (C) USUN 910

Classified By: CDA S. Brock for reason 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: A spike in tensions between the DRC and Rwanda became palpable last week as officials of both countries traded serious (but as yet) unfounded allegations. The state of relations between the two nations may be worse than at any time since Rwanda's 1998 invasion of the DRC. The latest round of inflammatory rhetoric is likely linked to recent statements by Congolese Tutsi rebel Laurent Nkunda that his goal is to overthrow the government of the DRC. Nkunda's statements and DRC hyperbole contribute to widespread Congolese paranoia of Rwanda and its supposed designs vis-a-vis North and South Kivu, a paranoia some leaders here willingly fuel because it diverts attention away from the government's many shortcomings. According to this "Congo logic," Rwanda authorized Nkunda's statements and intends to help him achieve his goals. Rwanda's allegations, as this logic goes, are a strategic ploy to ensure international support.

12. Summary (continued): We do not believe war is likely at this time, although reckless statements could lead to an explosion that would be difficult to contain, including a scenario whereby Congolese Tutsis would be killed. We must analyze carefully all official statements to determine what leaders really mean. A measured response by the international community, including specific actions to help leaders focus on practical ways to defuse tensions, is needed urgently, including calls from senior USG officials to the presidents of both countries and greater use of existing mechanisms (Tripartite Plus, JMG task force, MONUC mediation, International Facilitation, P-3 plus 2, etc.) to air grievances. It is vitally important that we maintain U.S. support for MONUC's Comprehensive Disengagement Plan. We might reconsider our diplomatic presence in Goma, with more frequent and longer stays by high-ranking officials. Finally, greater information sharing and coordination between our embassies in Kampala, Kigali, and Kinshasa are needed to ensure that all staffs have a better understanding of what is happening in the three countries. End summary.

Nkunda's statement triggers latest DRC-Rwanda crisis

¶3. (SBU) Laurent Nkunda's October 2 interview with the BBC in which he redefined the goal of his armed group, the CNDP, from protecting the Congo's Tutsis to instead "liberating" the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has unleashed waves of competing allegations between Congolese and Rwandan officials. According to many observers, relations between the two countries are more tense than at any time since Rwanda invaded the DRC in 1998. In a statement to P-5 ambassadors on October 4 (ref a), DRC Foreign Minister Mbusa Nyamwisi stated Rwanda was "clearly supporting the CNDP," and "is reinforcing its positions along the border with our country from Bunagana to Kibumba, in flagrant violation of all processes now underway." We and others contacted MONUC officials to ask if these allegations were based on documented troop movements. MONUC cannot verify the allegations.

¶4. (C) On October 5 the Rwandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a diplomatic note addressed to the Congolese Foreign Ministry criticizing the GDRC for an "alliance" between the DRC's armed forces (FARDC) and the ex-FAR Interhamwe/FDLR. The note, delivered to MONUC's representative in Kigali for forwarding to the Congolese Foreign Ministry, also states that the GOR "expresses strong concern against recent reported atrocious acts by DRC Security agencies in abducting, torturing and even killing of innocent Rwandans in Eastern DRC." We checked with a number of sources to learn more. The British ambassador in Kinshasa (pls protect) informed us that his officer in Goma had spoken with Human Rights Watch and others in trying to obtain more information on Rwandan allegations. The UK official reported that in mid-September six persons posing as Rwandans (including five

Tutsis) were arrested in the Congo. When interrogated these individuals claimed they were Congolese who work in Gisenyi and that they had voted illegally in the Rwandan parliamentary elections, as evidenced by inked fingers. Three of them were still in custody and, according to the UK official, did not appear to have suffered any kind of abuse.

"Congo logic:" there's a Rwandan behind every tree

¶5. (C) We discussed these developments with local observers. Their view is that Nkunda's statements have fueled what can only be described as "paranoia" among many Congolese (particularly the political elite and populations in parts of the country formerly occupied by Rwandan forces, including Kinshasa and the Kivus) vis-a-vis Rwanda and Rwandans, stemming from Rwanda's invasions of the DRC. In accordance with the "Congo logic" flowing from this paranoia, (1) Rwanda has never abandoned its most important national objective: the annexation of North and South Kivu to create a "Greater Rwanda" to ease demographic tensions and provide Rwanda with much-needed agricultural land and mineral resources; (2) Nkunda (who is a Congolese Tutsi) is really a Rwandan or, at the very least, a surrogate of Rwanda; (3) the Government of Rwanda approved Nkunda's October 2 statements, as it has all previous Nkunda/CNDP statements; (4) the Government of Rwanda can be expected to support Nkunda in his efforts to overthrow the DRC's democratically elected government; (5) the Government of Rwanda's unfounded allegations against the DRC are a calculated ploy to reclaim international support for its policies.

¶6. (C) Note: Embassy Kinshasa emphasizes that it does not endorse this viewpoint but believes that it is a useful framework for explaining many GDRC actions and statements. We also believe many Congolese leaders cynically contribute to anti-Rwandan sentiment to divert attention from the FARDC's many humiliating defeats and to deflect criticism of the GDRC's poor performance in almost every area since taking office in 2006. End note.

Despite tensions, war now is not likely

¶7. (C) Despite the ratcheting up of the rhetoric, we do not believe an all-out war between opposing armies is likely at this time. The GDRC knows that Rwanda's military forces are far superior to the FARDC and that it would quickly defeat should the Rwandans invade the DRC. MONUC, despite many limitations, is, nonetheless, a disciplined, well-equipped fighting force that would not be easily made to abandon its positions throughout North and South Kivu. And MONUC represents the international community, which would quickly condemn foreign aggression in the Kivus, a fact which is not lost on the DRC's neighbors.

¶8. (C) We believe a more likely conflict scenario would be an unexpected social "explosion" sparked by the heated environment and heightened tensions of the present moment. A minor "explosion" occurred in Goma on September 21 (ref b) when widows of FARDC troops killed in the Sake area attacked the Minister of Defense and the Governor of North Kivu who had come to the mortuary to pay their respects. Defense Minister Chikez, who on several occasions has used incendiary language against MONUC in what can only be interpreted as an effort to deflect attention from the FARDC's poor showing against the CNDP, became himself the object of the angry crowds he had stirred up. Crowds in Goma also turned against Tutsi businessmen, destroying a Tutsi-owned gas station. No reports of injuries or deaths, however, were reported. Although Chikez has been more circumspect since this incident, we are not optimistic he and other Congolese officials have internalized the lessons of September 21.

If Tutsis were killed, would Rwanda intervene?

¶9. (C) Many observers believe that although Rwanda is not likely to attack the DRC at the present time, it would not stand by if Congolese Tutsis were targeted and killed.

Embassy Kinshasa takes seriously all allegations of persecution against Tutsis and has instructed its human rights officer and its staff in Goma to investigate all such claims. To date we have had no credible reports in this connection. We would also note there is no history of massacres of Tutsis in the DRC. The dynamics of Tutsi-Hutu relations, as well as relations between Tutsis and other ethnic groups in the DRC, are significantly different than in Rwanda. Neither Tutsis nor Hutus are the main contenders for power here at the national or provincial levels. In fact, the CNDP itself has many non-Tutsi members, including Hutus. Thousands of Tutsis lead normal lives in the Kivus, going to work every day as ranchers, business owners, police officers, lawyers, etc. These Tutsis are not ostracized and many are involved in politics. At a meeting on October 4 North Kivu Governor Paluku asked Tutsi community representatives if recent DRC-Rwandan tensions have impacted their lives. We understand that no major complaints were forthcoming.

¶10. (C) Anti-Tutsi sentiment in the DRC does exist, however, as evidenced by the September 21 attack on a Tutsi-owned business in Goma. In fact, anti-Tutsi sentiment has clearly risen in recent years, undoubtedly as a result of Laurent Nkunda, whose stated goal of defending Tutsis has had the perhaps unintended effect of alienating tens of thousands of non-Tutsis, particularly those who have become displaced persons as a result of seizures of non-Tutsi properties by Nkunda's forces. Another unintended consequence of Nkunda's insurgency has been to make the Tutsis who have migrated to the areas he controls more vulnerable if an attack against them takes place. Should Nkunda exit the scene and a wave of anti-Tutsi violence occur, most of North Kivu's Tutsi civilian population is now conveniently clustered together in just a few locations and thus more easily targeted than they were just a few years ago.

Our challenge: to understand and to facilitate

¶11. (C) A major challenge for the U.S. in the coming months

will be to read between the lines as leaders of both countries make heated accusations. We must recognize that the GDRC does not speak with one voice and that some politicians make reckless and irresponsible statements for political gain. Others weigh carefully their words and intend to incite specific groups. We must improve our access to the Congo's leadership to refine our understanding of what leaders actually mean and intend. We must use to greater advantage the credibility and the trust we have accrued in both the DRC and Rwanda to urge a return to dialogue and a lowering of tensions with greater outreach to the most senior leaders in Kinshasa and Kigali, including calls or meetings from or with the USG's most senior officials. Our assistance programs, including military/security cooperation, should provide implicit and explicit incentives when required to bring leaders back from the precipice of military action.

¶12. (C) Engaging bilaterally with the Congolese and the Rwandans, or with members of the international community directly or through multilateral organizations, we also need to use to greater advantage existing forums and mechanisms for dialogue and the airing of differences. The upcoming November gathering of foreign ministers under aegis of the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission, a U.S. initiative to bring together senior military staff and diplomats from the four Great Lakes nations, is an excellent opportunity for ministers to meet personally and discuss latest developments.

We noted that the Tri-Partite Plus' Joint Verification Commission, created in December of last year, has not yet been activated; this body, if called into session by agreement of both countries, could help dispel many rumors and restore confidence. Weekly Friday meetings in Goma of the Joint Monitoring Group Task Force, with delegations from Rwanda, the DRC, MONUC, the European Union, the United States, and the African Union, could become more relevant to lowering tensions if both sides were to refrain from launching petty accusations. MONUC, with its political affairs staff in Goma, can become more involved in mediation efforts. In short, we believe that if the international community were to challenge both sides to present their

allegations formally (to the Joint Verification Commission, to the Joint Monitoring Group, or to MONUC) with a request that they be investigated, the number of unfounded allegations might go down.

Continued support for MONUC's plan is a must

¶13. (C) Continued U.S. support for MONUC's comprehensive disengagement plan is essential if the conflict in the east of the Congo is to be resolved. The plan, which SRSG Doss outlined at a meeting of the Security Council on October 6 (ref c), calls for the programming, in successive stages, of an immediate ceasefire, the separation of armed groups (including the FARDC), and the disarmament and demobilization of combatant groups. Carefully developed by MONUC in coordination with the international community and fully supported by the GDRC, the plan is a sensible roadmap for ending the fighting in North and South Kivu. Of particular note is the plan's call for zones of separation. When the zones have been created, MONUC troops will drive a wedge between CNDP, FARDC, and FDLR positions, making continued fighting much more difficult, if not impossible. Doss has also called for specific U.S. support for certain aspects of the plan, a request this embassy endorses.

¶14. (C) We need to consider carefully how we can best organize ourselves to play the most positive role possible in bringing peace to the eastern Congo. For one, we might reconsider our diplomatic presence in Goma. An O1 foreign service officer arrives next month on a two-year tour. The presence of a of an experienced full-time, long-term officer is a significant improvement over previous arrangements whereby a series of WAE TDY'ers and junior officers from Embassy Kinshasa have been "holding the fort" in Goma on a short-time basis. We believe, however, that while the

arrival an O1 officer is much needed, the extended presence (for 10 days or so each month) of a higher-ranking USG official with the rank of ambassador or special envoy, and with direct access to the ambassador in Kinshasa and the Assistant Secretary in Washington, could give extra muscle to our efforts. (Note: The European Union's senior envoy is in Goma every three weeks; his frequent visits, we believe, have ceded to the EU increased influence and leadership in the east relative to the United States. End note.)

¶15. (C) Finally, greater information sharing and coordination between our embassies in Kampala, Kigali and Kinshasa are needed to ensure that staffs have an in-depth understanding of what is happening in all three countries. Continued exploitation of eastern DRC's natural resources also reflects a risk to stability. For example, a greater understanding of the impact of illegal natural resource exploitation and cross-boarder trade must be better integrated into international and bilateral efforts to reduce tensions. We would encourage embassies Kampala and Kigali to send political officers, USAID officers, members of the Defense Attaché's staff and USG employees from other concerned sections and agencies to see for themselves what is going on inside the DRC. We also propose that ambassadors, DCM's, political and econ officers, USAID and DOD employees meet and discuss events in the east on a regular basis.

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